

Worship for Fleet URC & Beacon Hill URC

Sunday 21st March 2021

Seeds of Hope: In Unexpected Places



Led by Rev'd John Mackerness

Opening music: May the glory of the Lord

Welcome & Gathering Prayer Margaret Armes

In this season of Lent we reflect on our journey of faith with Christ, remembering that death no longer has a hold on us. Through Christ we are freed from the cold stone of the tomb and know the warm embrace of the light of life.

We light this candle on *this fifth Sunday of Lent*, remembering God's redeeming grace, and that new life comes out of death. We remember the former covenant written on stone, and the new covenant, written on our hearts, that we are God's children, and God's promise is life forevermore.

Prayer: As the days lengthen, dear God, may we remember that spring comes only after a long winter, that new life, eternal life, comes only after passing through death. In the name of Christ, with whom we journey towards the cross, we pray. Amen.

Call to worship

We come into the presence of Jesus to worship him today.
Let us make this time today a time where all are welcome, and all are included.

Lord of all, we thank you for giving your all to include us in your love.

Help us to follow your example, and to take up our cross and follow you.

Make us ready to receive and welcome all who come to us, so that they too 'may see Jesus'.

Amen.

Hymn: O Worship the King

Author: Robert Grant

O worship the King, all glorious above,
O gratefully sing His power and His love;
Our Shield and Defender, the Ancient of Days,
Pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.

O tell of His might, O sing of His grace,
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space,
His chariots of wrath the deep thunderclouds form,
And dark is His path on the wings of the storm.

The earth with its store of wonders untold,
Almighty, Thy power hath founded of old;

Established it fast by a changeless decree,
And round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Thy bountiful care, what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.

Introduction to the theme: Seeds of Hope in Unexpected Places

Today we are approaching the end of our Lenten journey and we are getting ready for Holy Week. We are still looking for seeds of hope. Sometimes those seeds are found in unexpected places.

Jeremiah has gone down in history as probably the gloomiest of all of the Old Testament prophets. Indeed, anyone who always goes around shedding gloom, despair and despondency is known as a Jeremiah. But in our reading from the book that bears his name there is a message of hope and of joy. Bad things may have happened to the people of Judah and of Israel but there was hope.

We will be challenged by our gospel passage but even there we can find seeds of hope. God had not forgotten the people of Jeremiah's time. God had not forgotten his son and God has not forgotten us. God brings about change in people's lives and the seed of hope that we have is that God will bring about change in our lives. The seeds of hope will yield a rich harvest. So, we pray to the God who gives us hope through his Son our Lord Jesus Christ.

Prayers of Adoration & Confession & Lord's Prayer

O God, we come before you, knowing that we are welcome in your house.

A warm feeling stirs within as we direct our footsteps here, knowing that our presence is wanted and anticipated, and that you have good things in store for your children.

Yours, Lord, were the arms stretched wide on the cross, a welcome to all in the midst of your agony. Yours were the arms spread in blessing after the resurrection.

Crucified Lord, risen Lord, we adore you in your pain and in your victory, your welcome ever the same, gathering us to you and blessing us, enfolding us in your loving embrace.

Lord, forgive us for not welcoming others as you do, for looking askance at the stranger in our midst.

We confess that we are quick to note the differences between ourselves and others, but you treat all people the same. Forgive us for revelling in the presumed privilege of being your children.

Help us to break down barriers to you; we cannot keep you to ourselves.

Help us to welcome, unconditionally, all who seek you, and to take your welcome wherever we go – to be church without walls.

God, thank you for welcoming us back no matter what we have done;
for that initial embrace that welcomed us, though we were sinners;
for the forgiveness that greets us every time we turn back to you.
Help us to embody your forgiveness in our dealings with one another and with those outside the flock.

May our welcome be the sign of the greater welcome that comes from you.
Amen.

And now let us say together the prayer that Jesus taught us
(led by Evelyn Tyler)

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven**

Give us this day our daily bread.

**And forgive us our trespasses,
as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

**And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

**For thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever
and ever. Amen**

Reading: Jeremiah 31: 31 – 34 read by Robert Mitchell

31 “The days are coming,” declares the LORD, “when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah.

32 It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them, ” declares the LORD.

33 “This is the covenant I will make with the people of Israel after that time,” declares the LORD. “I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.

34 No longer will they teach their neighbour, or say to one another, ‘Know the LORD,’ because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest,” declares the LORD. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Reading: John 12: 20 – 33 read by Bridget Mitchell

20 Now there were some Greeks among those who went up to worship at the festival. **21** They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, with a request. “Sir,” they said, “we would like to see Jesus.” **22** Philip went to tell Andrew; Andrew and Philip in turn told Jesus.

23 Jesus replied, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. **24** Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it

dies, it produces many seeds. **25** Anyone who loves their life will lose it, while anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. **26** Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honour the one who serves me.

27 “Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. **28** Father, glorify your name!” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and will glorify it again.”

29 The crowd that was there and heard it said it had thundered; others said an angel had spoken to him.

30 Jesus said, “This voice was for your benefit, not mine. **31** Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. **32** And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.”

33 He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die.

This is the Word of the Lord

Thanks be to God

Hymn: When I survey the wondrous cross

Author: Isaac Watts

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,

I sacrifice them to His blood.

See from His head, His hands, His feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down!
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were an offering far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.

Reflection: Let God be God

God had made a covenant, a contract if you will, with the people of Israel that had been written first in stone and then on paper. If the people followed God's commandments then God would, in turn, be faithful to the people, as a father is faithful to his children or, as Jeremiah says like a husband should be to his wife.

But the old contract hadn't been enough. The people had turned away from God and had broken their side of the bargain. For their continual acts of disobedience they had been punished and many had been sent into exile. Now Jeremiah believed that the time of their suffering was coming to an end and he was certain that God was about to do something new in the lives of the people.

There would be a new covenant where the sins of the people would be forgiven and forgotten. There would be a new beginning. But in order to achieve this change it was no longer

sufficient for the law to be written on paper or stone. No. It had to be written in the minds and on the hearts of the people. In other words it was no longer sufficient to go through the motions in some distracted way. The people had to get real if they were to enjoy the benefits of being God's children. The law would touch the whole lives of the people in ways that the old covenantal relationship never did. They would eat, sleep and breath the law until it filled their whole lives. People would no longer need to be taught about God because they would find him in their hearts. They would enter into an intimate relationship with God the likes of which they had never experienced before in their lives. Much as the monks of the Middle Ages found God by obedience to their master's rule so the people of Israel would find God in obedience to His law. This was their understanding of the new covenant and it is an understanding that still holds true for most Jews today. But as Christians we see the new covenant in a very different way. Our reading from John's gospel marks a turning point in Jesus' life. Until now Jesus has had an idea that events were about to come to a dramatic conclusion, but he was unsure of the exact timing. Now he is certain that events are leading inexorably to the cross, his death and resurrection. It is the visit of the Greeks that provides the trigger. Until now Jesus' ministry has been mainly to Jews. There have been some encounters with Gentiles on a one-to-one basis but never in great numbers. Now Jesus encounters a group of Gentiles, not just Greek speaking Jews. By this encounter Jesus now knows that the whole of creation will be drawn to him. He knows that his act of supreme sacrifice will be for the whole world not just for the Jews. Events can now go ahead

according to God's plan. This belief is confirmed when the people hear the voice of God proclaiming that Jesus' name will be glorified.

We know how the story goes on. For we believe that Jesus Christ, son of God who became man lived on earth in perfect love and obedience, died upon the cross for our sins, rose again from the dead and lives for evermore, saviour, judge, and king. We also believe that, by the Holy Spirit, this glorious gospel is made effective so that through faith we receive the forgiveness of sins, newness of life as children of God and strength in this present world to do his will.

God demanded a response from the Jews if they were to be his people. They were to have the law written on their hearts. What, I wonder is to be our response to the sacrifice that Jesus made upon that cross so long ago?

Isaac Watts knew what his response should be. We have sung it this morning. He wrote, "Were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small, love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all".

Jesus said "Those who love their own life will lose it; those who hate their own life in this world will keep it for life eternal.

Whoever wants to serve me must follow me so that my servant will be with me where I am".

This is the challenge to us as Christians. There are those academics that have tried to map out the stages of faith that people go through on their life journey. They have concluded that there is one transition that it is very difficult for us all to make and it is the transition that Jesus is talking about here. We are all individuals. We all have a very strong sense of who we are. We believe that what we are doing is what God has

called us to do. We are confident, competent, well respected and liked. We love our lives. Then, like the marathon runner or like Peter when he denied Christ, bang, we hit the wall. Suddenly all that we knew, all that we understood is turned on its head. Someone close to us dies, we lose our job, who knows what event triggers the crisis, but something does. Our faith that has held us and supported us suddenly takes on the consistency of quicksand. Like the seed we appear to die. But in the dark we encounter God in ways that we have never experienced Him before. Release from our ego, our resistance, our self-will we can surrender ourselves to God and emerge from the experience as new people, ready to live the lives that God wants us to live. We are now ready to serve God in new and exciting ways and our service is selfless.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, founder of the Jesuits wrote a famous prayer that we were taught at school. It says, "Teach us good Lord, to serve you as you deserve; to give and not to count the cost; to fight and not to heed the wounds; to toil and not to seek for rest; to labour and not to ask for any reward, save that of knowing that we do your will; through Jesus Christ our Lord". Just as the seed dies and is reborn in the spring so we are reborn to new life in Christ. We are open to God's call to each and every one of us to serve him.

One day a chicken and a pig were discussing how they could show their appreciation to their Master the farmer. The hen suggested with enthusiasm that they should provide the ingredients for a lovely, cooked breakfast such as bacon and eggs. The pig was quick to point out that that might be alright for the hen but for him this proposal was much more costly,

and he did not think that he loved his master enough for that kind of sacrifice.

God gave us his son to die that we might have eternal life because he loved us, his creation so much and wants to bring us back to God.

Are we like the hen prepared to give a little in return? Or are we like the pig that is faced with making the ultimate sacrifice for love.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, and my all.

But when God calls how will we truly respond?

In psalm 51 the psalm for today when David was at his lowest and everything was going wrong he prayed 'Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me'.

May this be our prayer today and every day. Amen.

Prayers of intercession
mercy

Response Lord in your

Hear our prayer

Father we thank you this morning that we are here worshipping you at all.

Someone first helped us to understand what the Christian faith was all about

Someone first helped us to know your love.

Someone first took the risk of sharing their own faith by what they did or said.

We thank you for that person, or those people, through whom we first encountered a living faith.

We thank you for them now, in the silence of our hearts.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Father, we know that the Church will die in this generation unless people go on doing what was done for us sharing their faith in action or explanation.

We pray for those who have a special gift for making the gospel relevant and attractive.

We pray for those who have a special way of living that draws others to Christ.

We pray for those who have a special opportunity for mission coming up soon.

Lord, in your mercy,

Hear our prayer.

Father, we acknowledge our own diffidence in sharing our faith the fear of embarrassment, of seeming manipulative, of losing the trust of friends.

Give us instead hearts full of love, and lives centred on Jesus Christ, so that our words and actions are all of a piece and always Christian.

So may we find ourselves naturally talking of Christian things, or talking of other things Christianly:

in the way we respond to stories in the news:

in the way we handle issues in the workplace:

in the way we defend the weak:
in the way we care for the wounded:
even in the way we answer the question 'What did you do on Sunday?'
Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

Father, we pray that this week we shall not be ashamed of being Christians:
that we shall not disown you or your standards:
that we shall not ignore the honest question.
We pray that this week we shall be glad to know you as Lord:
that we shall relax in the sheer normality of belonging to you:
that we shall speak of you and act for you with courtesy and integrity.
Give us we pray the dignity that was in Christ Jesus as he spoke of his Father's love.
Merciful Father accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ.
Amen.

Hymn: In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found
He is my light, my strength, my song
This cornerstone, this solid ground
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm
What heights of love, what depths of peace
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease

My comforter, my all in all
Here in the love of Christ I stand

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh
Fullness of God in helpless babe
This gift of love and righteousness
Scorned by the ones He came to save
'Til on that cross as Jesus died
The wrath of God was satisfied
For every sin on Him was laid
Here in the death of Christ I live

There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ

No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the pow'r of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath
Jesus commands my destiny
No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
'Til He returns or calls me home
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.

Blessing

Welcoming God, thank you for the welcome that Jesus offers out of his great love for all people.

Help us to follow his example.

Teach us to consider the needs of others even when this means we must lay something down.

Bless us as we meet with others, day by day; give us a spirit of welcome and friendship.

As you welcome us, help us to welcome those to whom you send us.

And the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be with us and those we love today, tomorrow and forever more. Amen.

Closing music: Thy hand O God has guided

Responses led by Evelyn Tyler

Opening music from [STF 031 - May The Glory Of The Lord](#)
[part of Singing The Faith; Contributed by Paul Wood & Ian Worsfold | The Worship Cloud](#)

Closing music: <https://www.smallchurchmusic.com/Snippet/S-ThyHandOGod-PipeLC-48-CAM.mp3>

Hymns: <https://www.smallchurchmusic.com/2016/Video/V-OWorshipTheKing-PipeL1C-128-CAM-Video-JD.mp4>

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